

Mealtime Magic happens when you feed your child's need for success!

3 and 4 year olds are at a special stage. They have a strong need to learn new skills. They love success and praise!

They are becoming more aware that they are a part of the family. Helping shop for food and fix it gives them a role in family life.

Children may be more likely to eat foods that they have chosen at the store or helped fix.

Thank them for helping and they will want to help again!

Let your child help!

- Children this age can unload bags after shopping.
- They can peel bananas, tear lettuce for salad, and put things in the trash.
- They like to help measure and stir.
- Children this age like to make simple sandwiches.
- They can help set the table.
- Children learn a lot through play. They love to have fun with food!



Mealtime Manners help make Mealtime Magic.

Children this age are ready to learn even more about how to behave at the table. Children learn quickly at this age. Calmly teach your child what you expect him/her to do.

Remind your child:

- We sit down to eat.
- We are polite. We say “please” and “thank you.”
- We don't chew and talk at the same time.
- We take small bites.
- We chew our food well, with our mouths closed.
- We swallow our food before we have a drink.

Do you have questions about your child's eating?

Ask your WIC staff. They can help you with all your nutrition concerns.



www.scdhec.gov/wic

mealtime magic

with your
3-4
year old



What to expect from your child between 3 and 4 years old:

Children this age are usually good at feeding themselves. They usually begin to eat a wider variety of foods. Mealtime is getting easier!

Expect children this age to eat better:

- when they are hungry at mealtime
- when they eat with others, so they can talk
- when they can show off their new eating skills
- when they are not forced to eat
- when they are not distracted by toys or television.

3 and 4 year olds are learning to use their hands well.

- They can eat neatly and use a napkin.
- They can use a fork and drink well from a cup.
- They make fewer spills and messes.
- They can help fix meals.

3 and 4 year olds still like familiar foods.

- They may still refuse to try new foods, but they will eat a wider variety of foods as they get older.
- They may like vegetables raw, since cooking brings out strong flavors.
- They may eat a new food only after it has been offered many times.



It's good to know that even the pickiest eater will eat enough to grow and be healthy if the foods you offer are nutritious.

Tips that work like magic!

Make sure your child is hungry for meals!

Children only eat well when they are hungry! Healthy snacks are still important but make sure snacks are mid-way between meals. Snacks too close to mealtime will spoil your child's appetite.

Make mealtime pleasant!

Children eat better when mealtime is pleasant! Try not to worry about what or how much your child is eating. Relax and connect with your family.

Watch what happens when you stop trying to make your child eat! Your child eats better. Let your child decide what to eat and how much, from the healthy foods you have fixed.

Praise still works like magic!

Children this age love attention! They love to learn and practice new skills and they can remember how to act at mealtime. Praise the behaviors you want to see more often and your child will repeat them!

You decide what's to eat.

You should decide the foods at each meal. Giving your child a choice between two foods is great-but you should decide what the two choices are! Don't make your child special food. Instead, serve at least one food at every meal that you know your child likes.

Eat together every day at a table.

Eat as many meals together as you can. Family meals help build strong families! Children eat better if they eat at a table. It helps them focus on eating. They are still easily distracted at this age, so turn off the television and take toys off the table. Mealtime is a good time to talk together.

Get in a daily routine of meals and snacks.

Child care centers know that children eat better when they have a daily schedule of meals and snacks. At this age, children also become much more aware of rules and they can remember them. Children like routines because they make them feel safe and secure.

Make mealtime rules simple and stick with them day after day.

Teach your child about foods!

Your child is learning every day. Teach the names of foods. Talk about their shape, color and taste. Color pictures of food. Explain how you are fixing foods. You are your child's best teacher, every day!

